

## “An Introduction to Bluegrass”

Fifty years ago, in the fall of 1969, I persuaded (badgered?) Mayne Smith into teaching a class in bluegrass music through the University of California, Berkeley “Center for Participant Education.” As far as I have been able to determine, this was the first time ever that such a class had ever been offered for academic credit.

Mayne Smith had received his Master of Arts degree in Folklore from Indiana University in 1964. His thesis paper was on the history and social context of bluegrass music. At the time bluegrass was still a somewhat regional music – certainly nothing like the worldwide phenomenon it is today. His “Introduction to Bluegrass” published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1965, is generally recognized to be the first scholarly study of the music.

This class, “An Introduction to Bluegrass”, was organized by myself in the fall of 1969. At the time I was an undergrad student in physics at the University of California and a wannabe bluegrass guitarist. There was a small group of bluegrass enthusiasts in the Bay Area who wanted to know more about the music and its roots, so I talked Mayne into teaching the class.

It was fortunate that among Mayne’s friends were a number of “second generation” bluegrass musicians living in or visiting the Bay Area who came in to share their experiences. These included Richard Greene, Peter Rowan, Butch Waller, Rick Shubb and others.

A few years ago, while cleaning out the garage I came across a number of audio tapes, long forgotten by me. Included among them were recordings of that class. I have since donated the tapes to the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Popular Music in Murfreesboro where they will be archived and eventually be made available for listening and study.

The recordings were made before quality recording equipment was readily available so the sound quality of these recordings is terrible. My remembrance is that I used a Wollensak reel-to-reel tape recorder, in monaural, through the mic that came with the recorder and simply placed on the desk. Thus you get to hear all of the ambient noise, paper shuffling, books being dropped on the desk, etc. in stunning low-fidelity!

Still, I feel fortunate that I kept these tapes and that they were still in good enough condition, more than 50 years later, to at least partially document what was probably the first academic multi-session course on bluegrass music. There is some really nice playing here in addition to the lectures. I hope that this will be of interest to historians of bluegrass.

--- Michael Mendelson (Santa Barbara, California – October 2019)